

**MusicSmiles.com  
The Worlds of Gilbert and Sullivan**

HOME

**Billy** Boy is categorised as a Traditional Sea Shanty. A Capstan Song. Its very bouncy, Skippy tune lends itself to dancing. It also has the distinction of being different to the normal sea shanty format (solo/chorus). It follows a question and answer design between two soloists with a short chorus at the end of each verse. In our MusicSmiles arrangement we've used a different 1st 'soloist' asking the question in each verse.

**There** is compelling evidence which leaves little room for doubt that its origins lie in the shanty: *Lord Randall* (or Rendal), first published in 'The Scots Musical Museum', and titled *Lord Ronald My Son*. This in turn may have been derived from an Italian ballad of the 1600s. It was originally called *Willie Lad*, and later *Charming William*. However, although the words of *Lord Randall* are similar both timing and tunes are radically different.

Sir Walter Scott associated the ballad with the death of Thomas Randolph (Randal), Earl of Murray (or Moray), Robert the Bruce's nephew. Randolph died (possibly poisoned) in Musselburgh in 1332. In The Journal of Folk Song Society it is suggested that Lord Randal is the 6th Earl of Chester, poisoned by his wife in 1232.

A lovely world they lived in, wasn't it? The Nancies in both stories seemed to have a penchant for eliminating their unwanted husband(s)! Nevertheless this seems a likely (probably Scottish) source of what is now one of the favourites of the Sea Shanty world! The well known jaunty 'traditional' tune is a must for any sea shanty concert. We hope you'll enjoy singing (and dancing?) our MusicSmiles arrangement of this famous shanty . . .

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